

## The Centre for Our Common Future and the 'Road to Brazil'

The Centre for Our Common Future was established in April of 1988 to act as a central focal point for follow-up on the 'Brundtland Report'. More than 150 organizations representing all sectors of human activity, from more than 65 countries, have publicly associated with the Centre as 'Working Partners' in an effort to further the debate on sustainable development and broaden the dialogue on the principal messages of the Report.

Naturally the Centre has taken an active interest and role in the preparations for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), scheduled to take place in Brazil during 1–12 June 1992. Indeed, the Centre hopes, as many others do, that the Brazil Conference will prove to be a turning point in the revival of multilateralism and international cooperation, and that the governments gathered there will take concrete steps to address the root causes of the global management crisis which we all face.

The Centre believes that a sustainable future for humanity is essentially a democratic one, and therefore what the 1992 Conference ultimately achieves will depend upon the involvement of individuals and organizations from all sectors of society participating actively in the process leading to it, as well as on the nature of the relationships and dialogue which those individuals and organizations establish among themselves and with governments.

### *Unique Opportunity Provided*

Recognizing that the UNCED will provide a unique opportunity for all sectors of society to interact and cooperate, and to ensure that governments arrive in Brazil with a firm commitment to action, the Centre provided the initial leadership in calling together representatives from more than 200 organizations from over 65 countries at meetings in Canada, Switzerland, and Kenya, during the months of March, June, and August, respectively, of 1990, to discuss 'the road to Brazil'. Organizations present at those meetings came from all sectors of society: environment and development NGOs (both those having consultative status with the UN and those that do not), trade unions, business and industry, professional associations, scientific and academic institutions, women's organizations, youth groups, religious and spiritual groups, indigenous peoples' organizations, and other citizens' groups. Together, these organizations represent a very wide range of views and can reach significant sections of the population.

Out of these meetings came a collective call to the Preparatory Committee of the UNCED to strengthen the development aspects of the agenda for the Conference and to open the preparatory process to representatives of all key sectors of society, both within and outside the public sector.

A major outcome of this series of meetings was the adoption of the term 'independent sectors', which it was felt would underline the plurality, diversity, and independence, of the various constituencies whose input into UNCED was needed. It was also felt that this term would make clear that not just traditional NGOs and INGOs but all sectors of society which were independent of governments needed to play a role in the lead-up to 1992 — stressing, however, that there should be no expectation that all of these disparate constituencies

would speak with one voice to the UNCED or be pressured to do so.

### *International Facilitating Committee Created*

The final outcome of the Centre's recent initiative was the creation of an International Facilitating Committee (IFC), to be made up of individuals selected from the various independent sectors. It should be noted that, while the Centre had convened the meeting at which the IFC was created, the decision to create it was taken by consensus of all the groups present and not at the initiative of the Centre. Indeed, the IFC will be operated independently from the Centre, with its own staff and finances.

In creating the IFC, it was emphasized by the groups present that the various independent sectors represent differing, and at times opposing, constituencies. Its purpose is not to attempt to facilitate the emergence of common or even consensus positions regarding UNCED amongst these differing constituencies, but rather to promote dialogue amongst them with a view to determining what common ground, if any, might exist, whilst recognizing that there will be positions on which consensus would be unlikely to be found or even attainable. It was also felt that, while the independent sectors are disparate and independent, they could all benefit from supporting one another in having their voices heard in the UNCED process. The IFC, it was noted, could play a key role in helping to build that mutual support.

As the momentum towards the Brazil conference builds up, it becomes ever-more-clear that it will need — even require — cooperation and participation among those who constitute the independent sectors, to maximize the use of their individual and collective resources. Never before have these sectors faced such an important challenge and opportunity for cooperation.

Obviously, no one organization or sector can meet such a challenge alone. It is essential that all groups and organizations play an active part in the process leading up to Brazil. Initiatives such as those put in place by the ELCI, ICSU, the Women's Foreign Policy Council, various international youth movements, and many others, are examples of the active interest and commitment to make UNCED the influential success that the world needs.

The Centre for Our Common Future will continue to support the efforts of all organizations that wish to play a role in UNCED, although it has assumed no responsibility for organizing any parallel event(s) in Brazil. That will be the responsibility of the various independent sectors, the Brazilian hosts, and possibly the IFC. The Centre, of course, would be happy to lend its support and assistance for any such event(s), should they be sought.

### *Centre's Own Three-pronged Programme*

In order to assist progress towards the 1992 UNCED, and to ensure the broadest possible participation in available opportunities, the Centre has designed and will carry out its own '1992 programme'.

A series of *Eco '92 Public Forums* will be held. These will provide an additional avenue of input for the public

to the official preparatory process and, in twelve locations around the world, will bring representatives of the Preparatory Committee to the people to listen and to learn of their concerns and expectations for UNCED.

*Network '92*, a monthly news bulletin will report, in hard copy and electronic format, on plans and strategies that are being put into place by members of the independent sectors, governments, and international institutions. To support and enable the Centre to deliver these programmes, a network of eight regional focal points will be established with the cooperation of the Centre's regional Working Partners.

Third and finally, the Centre will continue, and aspire to strengthen, its efforts to stimulate dialogue on sustainable development through the *Brundtland Bulletin* and its core information programme.

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## Global Environmental Conservation: Some General Aspects\*

### *Glimmerings of Hope*

A few years ago many of the older among us were thinking, and even saying publicly, that our world was in a terrible state and getting markedly worse. The basic reason for this gloom, which in some minds amounted to despondency, and which engendered such distressing works as the late Gordon Rattray Taylor's *The Doomsday Book*, was the ever-increasing numbers and profligacy of the human species. Egged on by tragic religious and other misleadership, and by poverty and ignorance not only in the Third World, humans, collectively, seemed to be insatiable in 'strangling our Earth', 'gobbling up irreplaceable raw materials', polluting air, soil, and water, and in generally threatening the future of our unique planet Earth or at least the life which makes it unique. Now however, there are some bright glimmerings, or better, of hope that we can avoid the abyss of planetary destruction, and in time even improve the general situation of Man and Nature. For this I believe we should set our chief hopes on, and support and encourage in every possible way, the main world bodies in the environmental/conservational movement, namely, IUCN (recently renamed the World Conservation Union), and UNEP (the United Nations Environment Programme). There are of course many others, but these two stand out for their clear and latterly unswerving leadership.

### *Environmental Movements Improving Prospects*

Basic to this improving prospect is, I think, the widening influence of the environmental movement, which had emerged in part because more and more enlightened and thinking people, ever-more-widely in the world, had come to realize that planet Earth — at least as we know it and glory in its life — could be gravely threatened, even as regards its future survival in anything like its present form. With this realization came fear that, if certain things were not done and actions taken very soon, the worst would happen. Fear leads naturally to action for avoidance, and although this commonly needs to be on a more-or-less global scale, with the increasing realization that our world is one — that everything we do, even as individuals, can affect it in however infinitesimally small a way — there have come more and more remedial actions, in actuality or at least prospect. Very widely these have taken one or another form of conservation — of raw materials, of special areas, of disappearing biota, and of the specific amenities of our life.

\* Some remarks made at the opening session of the (first) International Conference on the Conservation and Management of Rivers, held at the University of York, England, during 10–13 September 1990 — see page 376 of our preceding volume.

Ideally, as a biologist, one would like to see most natural features preserved in their 'original' form and pristine state, though clearly the time is long-past when this can be done at all widely. But is this necessarily so very sad? Are not numerous artificial, Man-made habitats, for example, more attractive aesthetically and productive of maintained biodiversity than their natural predecessors or counterparts? The answer is clearly in the affirmative, and for the benefit of Man and Nature. Think of Japanese and our own delightful gardens and contrived ecosystems; also note that, after nearly twenty years since the concrete jungle in which we live and work in Switzerland on the outskirts of Geneva was built and frightened them away after the first very few years, Nightingales (*Luscinia megarhynchos*) returned last spring to the too-narrow-for-nesting thickets alongside it, and regaled us nightly for the better part of a month. And as the seasons pass, we are entertained by a gratifying range and at times abundance of other bird-life.

When we come to consider freshwater habitats, however, their ecology and amenities are very different according to whether they are static or flowing. Of course there are all manner of 'grey' in-betweens; but in general the static bodies — including Man-made lakes and ponds — can be every bit as attractive biologically and aesthetically as their natural counterparts, and with due planning and planting, a good deal more so. But with flowing streams and rivers, the greatest caution and foresight have to be exercised in altering them, as Dr E. Barton Worthington will shortly indicate from the annals of his enviably wide and prolonged experience.

### *Need for Further Evolution of Homo*

But first I would like to propound the desirability of, if not venture as yet to launch, a *campaign for the further evolution of Mankind* — our unique species which has in many ways come so much farther in its evolution than any other living creature, that I for one cannot believe it could not be persuaded and guided to take one further vital step. That step should be from the present situation in which people think mainly of their own selfish interests and pursuits, to one in which they think and act first and foremost for the good and future of the world as a whole, and especially for the welfare of The Biosphere which, extending so far down in Earth's depths and up in its attendant atmosphere as any form of life exists naturally, constitutes practically our entire life-support. If only such welfare were the primary and abiding concern of people sufficiently widely in the world, they would surely convert enough of the others to the imperative of saving The Biosphere and see to it that the right actions